

Franklin Street Presbyterian Church
Franklin and Cathedral Streets
Baltimore
Baltimore City County
Maryland

HABS No. MD-187

HABS

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

FRANKLIN STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

HABS
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Location: Franklin and Cathedral Streets, Baltimore,
Baltimore City County, Maryland.

Present Use: Church.

Brief Statement
of Significance: This church, begun in 1844 and dedicated in 1847,
is the finest example of the Tudor Gothic
Revival style in Baltimore and is the master-
piece of a significant local architect,
Robert Carey Long, Jr. (1810-1849).

PART I. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character: The architect, Robert Carey Long, Jr. (1810-1849), was apparently influential in changing local architectural taste from the Classic to the Gothic. Excepting the special case of Godefroy's St. Mary's Chapel of 1806, Long's St. Alphonsus' R.C. Church was the first of this style in the city, 1842. His Greenmount Cemetery Gates of 1837 were also Tudor Gothic.

For details of the design, Long drew directly from plates in Specimens of Gothic Architecture by A. C. and A. W. N. Pugin, using elements from several plates.¹

With the exception of some changes, the church is substantially as originally built. Original woodwork includes the three main doors with their hardware, all but five rows of pews, the gallery rail, baseboard and chair rail moldings, a communion table (now in the vestibule), an altar piece (now used for communion), a three-seat settee and two matching chairs, and two smaller chairs.

2. Condition of fabric: Fabric is generally sound, but smoke blackened, and stone hoods and other moldings are eroded in places.

B. Detailed Description:

Generally, the main part of the church is a rectangle with gabled roof. The front facing south has a large main entrance with

1. See analysis in "Robert Cary Long, Jr. and the Battle of Styles" by Wilbur H. Hunter, Jr., in Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Vol. XVI, no. 1 (March 1957), pp. 28-30.

double oak doors and nicely trimmed with stone, with pilasters each side, the door having a Tudor-Gothic arched head and a stone Gothic cornice between the door head and the main window. The church window is divided into five vertical sections with stone mullions ending in trefoils, the window head is a larger Tudor-Gothic arch trimmed in stone.

On each side of the main entrance is an octagonal belfry about ten feet in diameter. These belfries or towers are about 60 feet high and are topped by embattlements. The top sections have louvered windows with small windows on the front below.

On each side of the towers are secondary entrances, similar to the main entrance but smaller, with Tudor arches of stone and arched windows above. These windows are trimmed with moulded brick.

The front gable of the church has crenels and merlons running up the rake, and is contained by the towers, the side entrances being topped by horizontal parapets with embattlements, forming returns for the parapet at the sides of the building.

Both sides of the building have seven bays with stained glass windows between and buttresses dividing the bays. The parapets on each side are approximately 35 feet above the first floor and are enriched with embattlements, consisting of crenels and merlons, the crenels having copper flashing and a sort of false gutter behind.

The gabled roof is of tar and felt covering and probably has scissor trusses spanning the church, although only the bottom chord is visible on the interior.

The Church is set back from the street about 15 feet on both the front and side. The forecourt in the front is raised three steps from the street and the side is sunken to the basement level. The property is enclosed with a cast-iron, Gothic-Revival fence with octagonal granite posts; the tops of the railings have crestings and a trefoil design. Both the forecourt and the sunken court are paved with brick laid in a herringbone pattern. Due to the slope of Cathedral Street the rear of the Church is sufficiently above grade to allow basement entrances in the last bay.

The main doors of the church are of oak and the main floor is raised three steps from the forecourt. Steps are of granite.

The interior of the church consists of a front vestibule about 12 feet wide and two ante-rooms into which the two front secondary doors enter. The belfries have circular stairs leading down to the basement and upward to the choir loft and towers. Both the vestibule and ante-rooms lead into the nave of the church which is approximately 55 feet wide and without columns. The length of the

nave is about 78 feet exclusive of the pulpit. Six of the stained glass windows on each side show in the nave; the seventh or front window shows in the ante-rooms.

The nave has oak paneling 4'-8" high, in Gothic design, with high oak panels about 9 feet high at both sides of the altar, which is recessed from the rear of the church and backed by a high oak screen, back-of the pulpit.

The ceiling of the nave is about 28 feet high at the side walls, sloping to a flat section in the center of the church about 32 feet high. The bottom chord of the trusses are exposed with knees trussed down at the buttresses and resting on brackets at the walls. These brackets rest on half round pilasters which in turn terminate on brackets about 6 feet above the floor. The trusses and decorative grilles are of wood, with all molding details in superimposed plaster.

The walls of the church, above the paneling, are of plaster, painted gray with painted joints simulating stone.

The church is lighted with suspended lanterns of iron and colored glass, one row of two fixtures to each bay.

The pews are of oak, the sides carved with poppy heads and finials.

The choir occupies a balcony over the front vestibule into which the main front window shows.

The basement of the church consists of a lobby at the foot of the stairs, with paneling to the ceiling and quarry tile floors, with rest rooms and a mechanical equipment room at the west side. The church has no boiler room as such, being heated by the district steam system.

The lobby leads into a parish hall, the full width of the church and about 50 feet long, ending in a stage at the north. Rooms flanking the stage are a kitchen at the west and an entrance lobby at the east, both with double doors to the outside.

The parish hall has a double row of wood-paneled columns, a plaster ceiling with lacunars or plaster panels, the ceiling being 9'-4" high. The floors are of wood parquet laid diagonally.

The foundation walls of the church are of stone below grade and brick above.

At the rear of the church, extending to Hamilton Street is a three story parish house, the full width of the church and about 30 feet deep. The design is similar to the church, the windows topped with brick Tudor-Gothic arches.

In general, the property is well maintained, although there is some spalling of the stone work. The rough, pinkish brick was originally painted.

Prepared by Dano Jackley, A.I.A.
March 1959

PART II. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

This was one of the several Presbyterian "colony" churches established under the influence of the Reverend John C. Backus, longtime pastor of the now removed First Presbyterian Church further downtown. The first meetings of the Sessions Committee of the new church met in the house of Dr. Backus, who undoubtedly took a significant part in selecting the architect and design.^{2*} His own proposed First Presbyterian Church (1853 and ff) was to be a magnificent specimen of Gothic architecture. The first minister of the congregation was Dr. William S. Plummer of Richmond, Virginia, installed March 10th, 1847.

The adoption of the architect and the design are of special interest. On August 26, 1844, the newly formed Sessions Committee met, and "Plans, Drawings and Estimates were submitted by Messrs. Minifie, Harris, (Napoleon) Le Brun, and Robt. Carey Long." The Committee formally resolved first "upon Employing an Architect," and second, "That Robt. C. Long be the Architect." Thereupon, "The sense of the Committee being taken by a viva voce vote as to the Style of Architecture to be adopted, it was decided in favor of the Gothic." On the 30th of August another meeting was held and Long appeared to explain his Gothic plan. Replying to inquiries he "made it appear that altho' a Church in the Grecian Style might be erected at a less cost than the Gothic, yet to have it completed in the same durable and substantial manner with the Gothic, its cost would be equal if not greater." The Committee then resolved to accept Long's Gothic plan.*

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2. Minutes of Board of Trustees, Franklin Street Presbyterian Church. A quarto manuscript book bound in canvas in possession of the church, not paged. It begins in 1844 and continues to 1924 with some loose papers to 1926. Until 1847, all affairs of the church were handled by the Board of Sessions; after that the church property is under the Board of Trustees.

* Indicates, hereinafter, a quotation from the above book.

FURTHER HISTORICAL INFORMATION

1. Original Construction, 1844-47

The inception and acceptance of the design has been described above. Long estimated the cost at \$28,000 and agreed to provide drawings and supervise construction for a commission of 5% less one quarter in consideration of its being a church.*

Work began in November, 1844. Michael Cornell was chosen as carpenter and wood carver. The Sessions Committee resolved that "the 4 leaf'd cap be taken at \$1.75," that is, the four leafed crocket for the pew ends, but that the carving on the main doors be paid for by actual cost and not by estimate. Francis Burns supplied the brick as follows: "run of the Kiln, \$6 per M, Front by pattern, \$12 per M, paving, \$7 per M." One "Williams" was the bricklayer, and one "Johnston" supplied the hinges for the main door. Mr. Gilmor supplied lime at 30¢ a bushel. Mr. Maxwell was paid to "oil the stone." In January, 1846, George I. Roach was chosen to paint the exterior "and sand it on two sides" for \$850; the sanded sides probably being the exposed south and east. Mr. Erban of New York supplied the organ for \$2500, and it was apparently installed in the gallery or choir loft. In 1847 gas lighting was installed. The total original cost of the church was actually \$38,000 and the committee protested Long's commission on the grounds that he had been dilatory in providing drawings, thus adding to the cost. Apparently, however, they paid in full in 1847.*

No original drawings of the church have been found. However, in 1845 the Committee voted to have "500 copies of Mr. Long's lithograph printed.*" The church possesses a handcolored lithograph with the following legend in hand lettering: "R. Cary Long Archt./ Balto. 1845/ Franklin Street Presbyterian Church." I believe this to be the proof copy, and that no more were printed. Long is known to have made other lithographs, some of which are in The Peale Museum collection. This one shows the church substantially as built, with six bays to the nave, iron fence, and other details.

2. The enlargements of 1872

In June of 1872 the Board of Trustees plans "improvements, alterations and extensions" according to the proposals of McComas & Paine, architects and builders. In September a contract is let with these people for "the extension of the church and organ loft." The ultimate cost is \$8,500. The interior is also repainted.*

There are no existing plans of the improvements, and the only significant comment in the Board's minutes is that there are now five additional rows of pews.* However, there are now seven

window bays against the six shown in Long's lithograph, and there is a very plain hiatus in the brickwork at the seventh exterior buttress. Undoubtedly the extension consisted of a full bay to the north, and the shallow extension behind the pulpit. I can not identify any obvious changes in the gallery.

It is puzzling that the stone sill for the seventh window, and the extended stone trim course appear exactly as weathered as the rest. I suggest that the original church had two windows on the north side and the trim course extended around that side, and that this material was used in finishing the new section. Since there was originally no house behind the church, it is likely that it would have been finished in this way.

A "moulding" was placed behind the pulpit at this time, but there is no further information as to what this was.* I cannot tell which of the pews are newer. There are, however, five more rows of pews now than there were in 1847 according to the accounts for renting pews.

3. Shifting the Organ and Choir, 1888 and 1902

In April, 1888, a new organ by Hook & Hastings of Boston was installed in the north end of the church. The pipes are behind the pulpit, but the console is not clearly located. The choir occupies several pews nearby.*

In May, 1901, a sketch of a proposed screen for the choir is examined, and in October, 1902, on the advice of "the architect" (not identified) and the organ builders, the choir screen is erected with the organ console behind it, and a new "pulpit front" and "singers platform" are built at a cost of \$1,650.*

A photograph taken about 1924, in the possession of the church, shows this arrangement clearly. A stage about thirty inches high was built in the center of the north end of the church. At the rear of this, across the shallow apse, was a carved wooden screen, and behind this was the organ, console and choir. Older church members confirm this arrangement and comment that the choir was very cramped for space behind the screen.

Part of the choir screen is now in the gallery, and some of the platform is still in place.

4. Interim improvements of 1911

In May, 1911, electric lighting is installed by Samuel T. Gray for \$335. In June, architects William M. Ellicott, Jr. & William W. Emmart of Baltimore consider the problem of "treating the outside of the church." In October, Neal Farham Inc. of New York

propose to sandblast the exterior of the church, four sides for \$2,115 or two sides for \$1,400. The south and east sides are done, and remain clean of paint today.*

5. The Major Changes to the Interior, 1925-26

In March, 1925, at a meeting of the Men's Association of the church, Dr. Harris E. Kirk, then in his 24th year as minister, urged the purchase of a new organ but went on to suggest extensive interior renovations so as "to conform with the Tudor architecture of the building." He estimated this would cost \$55,000 according to plans by William Gordon Beecher, architect.*

In considering the changes which were made at this time the influence and taste of Dr. Kirk must be recognized. He was a scholarly man with great interest in Gothic architecture among other things. Older members of the congregation today give him full credit for initiating the renovations and for closely supervising the plan and construction. It appears that the money was raised as a 25th anniversary memorial to Dr. Kirk; it is worth noting that he served fifty-one years as minister in all.

The changes to the interior consisted of the following:

a. An organ by Skinner of Boston was installed in the gallery, along with four of the old pews, and some of the 1902 choir screen.*

b. The pulpit platform was shortened and changed. A carved wainscoting was installed against the wall behind the pulpit, and along the rest of the north wall. Dr. Kirk contributed the present pulpit, and the old altar piece was placed in front as a communion table.*

c. The basement was completely renovated by Morrow Brothers, contractors, at a cost of \$24,195 plus 5% overhead and 10% commission, which included removing a brick wall and placing steel beams to support the church floor, installing a kitchen, and decorating with chestnut panelling and wooden ceiling beams.*

With the exception of the stained glass, the church was then as it is today.

6. Stained Glass and Sculpture

Originally there was some painted glass, and in 1881 H. I. Gemhart was paid to repaint some of it.* Several of the lancets in the towers have glass painted in the style of the 1840's, and the large south window was of this style.

In April, 1890, Miss Marie McCoy offered a window in memory of the late Professor McCoy "which she had had prepared in England."* This is the fifth window from the entrance on the east side, but not signed.

The first window on the east side is marked "D'Ascenzo Studios, Phila. & New York," and is dated either 1910 or 1916.

All the other large windows were installed between 1924 and 1952, and are by either Charles J. Connick or the later ones, Connick Associates, Boston. Each is dated.

A smaller window in the vestibule is of the period of 1880.

In 1955 the large south window was completely removed because of deterioration, and temporarily replaced with pale yellow glass in metal sash. There are plans to install stained glass in the future.

In June, 1899, "certain ladies of the Congregation" were given permission to place a "mural memorial tablet" to the memory of Dr. William Murkland in the church. In May, 1900, Mr. Bayard, a member of the Board of Trustees, showed a design for the memorial tablet, which was accepted.* The sculptured marble tablet was eventually installed in the rear of the church. It is not signed.

In the vestibule, east end, is a sculptured marble plaque marked "Arixanna Handy/ Otto Sutro/ met and were married 1869 in this church." It is signed "Schuler 1944" (Hans Schuler Senior).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Virtually all of the historical information was obtained from the Minutes of the Board of Trustees. Specific citations are marked with an asterisk. There is no known better source.

A short analysis of the church is in The Architecture of Baltimore: A Pictorial History by R. H. Howland and E. P. Spencer (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), pages 97 and 98, picture page 131. See pages 91 and passim on Robert Cary Long, Jr.

A discussion of building the church with longer quotations from the Minutes is in "Robert Cary Long, Jr. and the Battle of Styles" by Wilbur H. Hunter, Jr., *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. XVI, No. 1 (March 1957), pp. 28-30.

The only known important historical views of the church are the proof lithograph mentioned earlier by Long, 1845, and two photographs in possession of the church showing the interior before the 1925-26 renovation.

Prepared by Wilbur H. Hunter, Jr.
Director, The Peale Museum

November 1958